

FARNSWORTH OF THE QUARTER CIRCLE F

By James R. Mann, Jr.

Drawings by Frank Tenney Johnson

THE conductor raised his arm, gave the high ball to the engineer, and with a series of racking coughs and spasmodic grunts the wheezy little engine on the horny toad division of the Santa Fé started our train. We were on our way with twenty-eight cars of Quarter Circle F steers. To Baldy and me had fallen the pleasant job of personally conducting the aforementioned steers from Eagle, New Mexico, to Chicago.

Baldy climbed up into the crow's nest of the caboose, and I followed suit, notwithstanding the sign that read "Trainmen Only." I usually followed suit where Baldy was concerned, for the reason that no other plan was feasible. Baldy produced a sack of tobacco and some papers from his frayed vest pocket, and proceeded with some deliberation to roll a cigarette. Then, tearing the rubber band from the package of papers, with the gravity of his kind he gently removed an inoffensive fly that was sunning itself on the window sill. The rubber band did not even touch the sill lightly in passing; it merely removed the fly with the ease and celerity of a willing instrument in the hands of a trained performer who had day herded for weeks at a stretch, with sometimes nothing to do for hours but sit in his saddle and flick persistent flies from the horse's neck. Baldy was not conscious of his superiority in this line, although not irritatingly so, and he smiled as he contemplated his dexterity.

Having seen these exhibitions before, and knowing Baldy as one bedfellow knows another, I was not awed, and ventured to ask how long we should remain in Chicago. It was necessary to ask, because my associate had the drover's return pass that was to bring us both back. My genial friend repeated his fly performance and smiled once more. He was distinctly in his element. If there had only been a Mexican to badger from the window of the caboose as we moved slowly up hill, he would have asked nothing better. After thinking seriously for a few moments, he gruffly answered my query. He did not know; he had not been in Chicago in two years.

Somewhat surprised to know that he had been there two years before, I inquired how he liked the town. "It's big," he said, "it's big; reckon it's bigger'n the whole o' Sierra County. Me and Charlie Farnsworth went together—and what I mean is we had a time that was a time. You know Charlie?"

Did I know Charlie? Well, I hoped so! Charlie owned the eleven hundred steers in the cars we trailed behind, and thousands of others on the range bore his brand,—a split left ear, an undersloped right ear, and an F on the left hip. He was my employer, and he owned one of the finest residences in Albuquerque. Did I know Charlie Farnsworth? What a question!

YES," chuckled Baldy, "me and Charlie sure had a time. "Ole man Farnsworth," he resumed after a slight pause, "used to ship to Chicago on account of a friend he had there in the commission business. When the ole man died Charlie kept it up, though the Kansas City market is nearer; and two years ago he decided as how he was makin' so much money he ought to spend some of it. I acquiesces cheerful, and me and him went to Chicago with the last bunch o' threes he shipped that summer.

"We turns our train over to the commission house when we hits ole Chi. and drags it fer the swellest hotel in town, a ridin' in one o' them taxicabs. That automobile slid through the city like a lonesome steer driftin' from a herd. Partner, it sure drifted! Charlie allowed he'd hire 'em by the hour after that, and I makes the resolution unanimous. The machine pulls up in front of a big tall buildin', and I we hops out to take a preliminary survey. Son, it were some posada, it certainly were!

"Charlie moseys inside, me follerin', and when the formalities has been complied with we hikes fer our rooms. 'Rooms' is the word, ole bean eater; they were two of 'em, and a bathroom extra. I judge we come pretty nigh wearin' the bathtub out in the next few days. It was the first time in my life I'd had a chance to wash as often as I wanted to; and believe me I'm sayin' somethin' when I bellows that I acted like a fish! If I ever strike it rich I'm a goin' to have sixteen bathrooms and all the fixin's and a bar in my house—hang the other things!

WE'D been gambolin' around fer several days, when one night at supper a bomb explodes, as Lady Mary Jane says in 'Who Stole Howard Ransome's Wife?' Charlie hadn't been eatin' hearty,—and the chuck was good too,—but presently he says, 'Baldy, you ain't eatin' right.'—'I ain't, ain't I?' I says, kind o' surprised. 'Well when you get an appetite like I got you can talk. I've mowed away a beefsteak, three

boiled spuds, sixteen spring onions, and two glasses o' milk, and I haven't rightly begun yet to satisfy my natural and healthy cravin' fer food,' I says. 'And more-over,' I says, 'I'm weighted down with the hope that this can be repeated after the theayter,' I says, 'like it was last night. Ain't eatin' right—huh!'

"I was not referring to the state of your appetite," he answers in a weary tone; 'but rather to your mode of satisfying the healthy craving you have spoke about.'—'Out with it!' I says. 'What kind of a brandin' iron is burnin' your hide now?'—'Baldy,' says he, 'I grieve to find that you have the vulgar habit of transporting food from your plate to your mouth on a knife, and,' he continues with noticeable anguish, 'that is not the proper procedure.'—'Oh,' I says, 'it ain't! What are these here knives fer?'—'These knives, Baldy,' he says, 'are placed at your disposal by the management of the hotel,' he says, 'fer the purpose of cutting the food which is served you into small enough quantities to be handled with comfort.'—'Do I look uncomfortable?' I says, gettin' mad. 'No, Baldy,' he replies, 'I must confess that you do not.'—'Will these here silver knives cut anything?' I says. 'No, Baldy,' he replies, 'I must confess that they will not.'—'You bet they won't!' I says. 'They got an edge on 'em like a railroad rail. Fer why? So you won't cut your mouth if you ain't expert, that's why. Now lemme alone; I'm hungry!'

"Charlie worries hisself half to death durin' the next couple o' days because we don't do things like the rest o' the swell moguls struttin' in and out o' the hotel. 'Which what I mean,' I says to him real peevis, 'there's a heap o' folks back in New Mexico with the same homely habits we got, and,' I says further, havin' read the dictionary and the books on etiquette and other tomfoolery he'd bought, 'I am of the firm opinion that it would be not only unwise but even dangerous to our safety and welfare when we return ere long to the place from whence we came, to attempt to change or to disregard the methods used by our friends and neighbors in the legitimate and necessary transportation of food from the plate to the mouth. And so,' I continue, 'my mind is fixed in unalterable opposition to enlargin' the function of the fork. Now,' I says, 'let's step into the bar and tap a small bottle apiece. They can't be no argument on how to do that.' Partner, he welcomes the suggestion with relief.

HE keeps a worryin', though, and finally we takes a taxicab, hired by the hour, and goes over to the stockyards to see Mr. Scott of Scott & Carbell, the commission house Charlie ships to. Charlie tells Mr. Scott his troubles, and the ole gent twinkles his brindle colored eyes a listenin'. Then he looks Charlie in the face and asks him if he's as much of a gentleman as his father was. Charlie allows he tries to be, and the ole gent writes a letter, puts it in an envelope, addresses the envelope, and hands it to him with instructions to take it to the address given and to keep tryin'.

"We jumps into the auto once more and shows the address to the pilot. He nods his head, and we're gone. We run east quite a spell and then turned south. There's some mighty good trails on the south side of Chicago, fine houses and big trees, and if did seem good to get out on a street where they were plenty o' room. Down-town wagons is thicker'n ticks on a jack rabbit's

ears, and I always felt like I was cramped up in a stock car; but out on them boulevards things was a heap different.

"Finally the pilot pulls up at our destination; which the same is a nice lookin' little brownstone house on Oakwood Boulevard. Charlie and your Royal Highness sidles up to the doorbell and gives it a strong push. Charlie couldn't hardly take his hand off o' the bell. All same like a man ridin' his first pitchin' hoss,—grabs the horn and can't let go fer frijoles nor money. A girl comes to the door, and Charlie hands over the note. She says she'll take it right up and will we come in and set down. We chassés into the parlor and sets on a couple o' chairs, me thinkin' what a Missouri mule my compadre is, and him thinkin' the same.

"Set off the fireworks, Brother; things is beginnin' to look up! A little lady steps into the room with one o' them sunny smiles you hear about, and she looked as good to me as a full moon on a dark night. Partner, she wasn't a peach—oh, no, she was a whole orchard, that girl! If you bet your money she was the real article, you'd be feelin' like a cattle king in no time. Dark hair, with her little ears tryin' to steal up into it and hide; blue eyes, blue as the New Mexico sky itself; and little red lips quiverin' around her ivory white teeth. Son, she was it! I've said my say. I can't say no more; but she sure was it with me! She could a had my coat and hat fer the askin'.

"She steps up to Charlie and says, 'Mr. Farnsworth?' Charlie answers kind o' dazed, and she says, 'I am Miss Nelson,' and then, turnin' to me, 'This is Mr.—Mr.—'—'Baldy,' says Charlie.—'Oh, yes,' she says, 'Mr. Baldy.'—'Not Mr. Baldy,' I busts in some flustered; 'just Baldy.'—'I think I will begin instructions at once,' she says. "'Mr. Baldy' is the correct form.' I sees she's put in her ante on a misdeal; but, bless her heart, I couldn't say nothin'. I was a feared to, and besides anything she says goes with me. You put a blue chip on that, my son, you can't lose no way at all!

"She explains as how she's a tooter, which the same is a term applied to people which learns children that is too blame ignorant to be learnt. Instructin' a New Mexico cowman is not exactly in her line; but for Mr. Scott's sake she will do her best. 'Be on your way, gentlemen, and appear bright and early to-morrow morning at nine o'clock.' She sure does have the United States language on the tip of her tongue, and before we knows it we're outside in a weak and tremblin' condition, gazin' at each other with the expression of a locoed cow. 'Oh, dishpans!' says Charlie, havin' some delicacy about usin' stronger words. 'I can't learn nothin' from her!'—'You can't, eh?' I says, feelin' at a loss to express my sentiments without promiscuous language. 'That girl knows a heap more'n you ever fergot. I judge she knows more'n a dictionary or an almanac. You can't learn nothin', huh? A body'd think you was a handbook o' universal information, the way you talk.'

"It ain't," he says mournful, 'that she don't know enough; but I couldn't learn from keepin' my mind on her. My heart's out o' whack now,' he says, puttin' his lunchhooks on his side with a dismal groan. 'Come on, Mr. Baldy,' he says, perkin' up, 'let's drift back to the hotel.'

"That evenin' at supper he acts like a hopeless case. He reminded me o' them newspaper articles which says, 'The doomed man ate a hearty supper, consistin' of a whole glass o' water and a hunk o' apple pie.'

THE next mornin' we drags it fer Miss Nelson's abode to take the first lesson on how to become members o' the great aggregation o' high steppers which is noted fer their ability to handle a fork and their inability to use a pick and shovel. Charlie is creatin' imaginary difficulties in his mind; but I informs him with considerable emphasis that a man which has rode pitchin' hosses fer eight years ought to be able to attend to a simple proposition like this.

"Charlie has a slight amount o' brain tissue still remainin', however, and he springs a brilliant scheme; namely, as follows, to wit: We takes our instruction whirlin' through the parks in the taxi; no indoor workouts fer such wild hombres as we be. Little Rays o' Sunshine accedes cheerful to his demand, and we starts on our way. After careful observation on the part of the foreman of our outfit, she tells Desirous o' Bein' Learnt that a flamin' red tie is not quite the thing, and she advises somethin' a bit quieter. The tie was a regular carnival ribbon too; but I ain't sayin' nary a word. She has me buffaloed from sombrero to spurs. Then she breaks the poor boy's heart by remonstratin' in low tones against the headlight he sports as a stick-pin. That pin set Charlie back four hundred bucks, and it was a beauty,—a big gold hoss-shoe set with diamonds. I explains



Baldy Was Conscious of His Superiority at Catching Flies.